THE RANCH AT THE WOLVERINE

A tale of the wild outdoor life of pioneer days that called forth all the courage and resourcefulness of men and women inured to danger and hardship

By B. M. BOWER

The trouble with so many Western stories is that they are preposterous. The hero is always young, handsome and a dead shot. He never has even a remote fear of anything, no matter what the circumstances, and he is a glutton for hardships. The heroine is never anything less than beautiful. She rides like a goddess, handles a gun like a veteran, and possesses the wisdom of the ages, though she be not old enough to vote. In "The Ranch at the Wolverine" there is a refreshing difference. The hero, the heroine, and the various and sundry other characters in the story, perform like regular human beings. The men seem to be the kind that cuss and chew tobacco when out of sight and sound of their wives. The women have crying spells and fits of temper and gossiping bees and so on, just like women in real life. There's not a dead shot in the tale, and nobody is too handsome and good to be human. You will surely enjoy this serial.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

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Let Us Start at the Beginning.

FOUR trail worn oxen, their necks bowed to the yoke of patient servitude, should really begin this story. But to follow the trail they made would take several chapters which you certainly would skip—unless you like to hear the tale of how the wilderness was tamed and can thrill at the stern history of those who did the taming while they fought to keep their stomachs fairly well filled with food and their hard muscled bodies fit for the fray.

There was a woman, low browed, uncombed, harsh of voice and speech and nature, who drove the four oxen forward over lava rock and rough prairie and the scanty sage. I might tell you a great deal about Marthy, who plodded stolidly across the desert and the low lying hills along the Blackfoot, and of her weak souled, shiftless husband whom she called Jase when she did not call him worse.

They were the pioneers whose lurching wagon first forded the singing Wolverine stream just where it greens the tiny valley and then slips between huge lava rock ledges to join the larger stream. Jase would have stopped there and called home the sheltered little green spot in the gray barrenness. But Marthy went on up the farther hill and across the upland, another full day's journey with the sweating oxen.

They camped that night on another little, singing stream in another little valley which was not so level or so green or so wholly pleasing to the eye. And that night two of the oxen, impelled by a surer instinct than their human owners, strayed away down a narrow, winding gorge and so discovered the Cove and feasted upon its rich grasses. It was Marthy who went after them and who recognized the little, hidden Eden as the place of her dreams—supposing she ever had dreams. So Marthy and Jase and the four oxen took possession, and with much labor and many hard years for the woman and with the same number of years and as little labor as he could manage on the man's part they tamed the Cove and made it a beauty spot in that wild land. A beauty spot, though their lives held nothing but treadmill toil and harsh words and a mental horizon narrowed almost to the limits of the grim, gray rock wall that surrounded them.

Another sturdy souled couple came afterward and saw the Wolverine and made for themselves a home upon its banks. And in the rough little log cabin was born the girl child I want you to meet—a girl child when she should have been a boy to meet her father's need and great desire; a girl child whose very name was a compromise between the parents. For they called her Billy for sake of the boy her father wanted and Louise for the girl her mother had longed for to lighten that terrible loneliness which the far frontier brings to the women who brave its stern emptiness.

When Billy Louise was twelve she wanted to do something big, though she was hazy as to the particular nature of that big something. She tried to talk it over with Marthy, but Marthy could not seem to think beyond the Cove.

When she was thirteen Billy Louise rode over with a loaf of bread she had baked all by herself, and she put this problem to Marthy:

"I've been thinking I'd go ahead and write poetry, Marthy—a whole book of it with pictures. But I do love to make bread—and people have to eat bread. Which would you be, Marthy—a poet or a cook?"

Marthy looked at her a minute, lent her attention briefly to the question and gave what she considered good advice.

"You learn how to cook, Billy Louise. Yuh don't want to go and get notions. Your maw ain't healthy, and your paw likes good grub. Po'try is all foolishness. There ain't any money in it."

"Walter Scott paid his debts writing poetry," said Billy Louise argumentatively. She had just read all about Walter Scott in a magazine which a passing cowboy had given her. Perhaps that had something to do with her new ambition.

"Mebby he did and mebby he didn't. I'd like to see our debts paid off with po'try. It'd have to be worth a hull lot more'n what I'd give for it."

"Oh! Have you got debts, too, Marthy?" Billy Louise at thirteen was still ready with sympathy. "Daddy's got lots and piles of 'em. He bought some cattle and now he talks to mommie all the time about debts. Mommie wants me to go to Boise to school next winter, to Aunt Sarah's. And daddy says there's debts to pay. I didn't know you had any, Marthy."

"Well, I have got. We bought some cattle, too, and they ain't done 's well's they might. If I had a man that was any good on earth I could put up more hay. But I can't git nothing outa Jase but whines. Your paw oughta send you to school, Billy Louise, even if he has got debts."

"He says he wishes he could, but he don't know where the money's coming from."

"How much 's it goin' to take?" asked Marthy heavily.

"Oh, piles." Billy Louise spoke airily to hide her pride in the importance of the subject. "Fifty dollars, I guess. I've got to have some new clothes, mommie says. I'd like a blue dress."

"And your paw can't raise fifty dollars?" Marthy's tone was plainly belligerent.

"Got to pay interest," said Billy Louise importantly.

Marthy said not another word about debts or the duties of parents. What she did was more to the point, however, for she hitched the mules to a rattly old buckboard next day and drove over to the MacDonald ranch on the Wolverine. She carried $50 in her pocket, and that was practically all the money Marthy possessed and had been saved for the debts that harassed her. She gave the money to Billy Louise's mother and said that it was a present for Billy Louise and meant for "school money." She said that she hadn't any girl of her own to spend the money on and that Billy Louise was a good girl and a smart girl, and she wanted to do a little something toward her schooling.

A woman will sacrifice more pride than you would believe if she sees a way toward helping her children to an education. Mrs. MacDonald took the money, and she promised secrecy—with a feeling of relief that Marthy wished it. She was astonished to find that Marthy had any feelings not directly connected with work or the shortcomings of Jase, but she never suspected that Marthy had made any sacrifice for Billy Louise.

So Billy Louise went away to school and never knew whose money had made it possible to go, and Marthy worked harder and drove Jase more relentlessly to make up that $50. She never mentioned the matter to any one. The next year it was the same. When in August she questioned Billy Louise clumsily upon the subject of finances

"D'you Turn Them Calves Out Into the Corral?"

and learned that daddy still talked about debts and interest and didn't know where the money was coming from she drove over again with money for the schooling. And again she extracted a promise of silence.

She did this for four years, and not a soul knew that it cost her anything in the way of extra work and extra harassment of mind. She bought more cattle and cut more hay and went deeper into debt, for as Billy Louise grew older and prettier and more accustomed to the ways of town she needed more money, and the August gift grew proportionately larger. The mother was thankful beyond the point of questioning. An August without Marthy and Marthy's gift of money would have been a tragedy, and so selfish is mother love sometimes that she would have accepted the gift even if she had known what it cost the giver.

At eighteen, then, Billy Louise knew some things not taught by the wide plains and the wild hills around her. She was not spoiled by her little learning, which was a good thing. And when her father died tragically beneath an overturned load of poles from the mountain at the head of the canyon Billy Louise came home. The Billy of her tried to take his place and the Louise of her attempted to take care of her mother, who was unfitted both by nature and habit to take care of herself. Which was, after all, a rather big thing for any one to attempt.

Jase began to complain of having "all gone" feelings during the winter after Billy Louise came home and took up the whole burden of the Wolverine ranch. He complained to Billy Louise when she rode over one clear, sunny day in January. He said that he was getting old, which was perfectly true, and that he was not as ablebodied as he might be and didn't expect to last much longer. Billy Louise spoke of it to Marthy, and Marthy snorted.

"He's ablebodied enough at mealtimes, I notice," she retorted. "I've heard that tune ever since I knowed him. He can't fool me!"

Jase maundered in at that moment, and Marthy turned and glared at Jase with what Billy Louise considered a perfectly uncalled for animosity. In reality, Marthy was covertly looking for visible symptoms of the all-goneness. She shut her harsh lips together tightly at what she saw. Jase certainly was puffy under his watery, pink rimmed eyes, and the withered cheeks above his thin graying beard really did have a pasty gray look.

"D'you turn them calves out into the corral?" she demanded, her voice harder because of her secret uneasiness.

"I was goin' to, but the wind's changed into the north, 'n' I thought mebby you wouldn't want 'em out." Jase turned back aimlessly to the door. His voice was getting cracked and husky, and the deprecating note dominated pathetically all that he said. "You'll have to face the wind goin' home," he said to Billy Louise. "More'n likely you'll be facin' snow too. Looks bad off that way."

"You go on and turn them calves out!" Marthy commanded him harshly. "Billy Louise ain't goin' home if it storms. I sh'd think you'd know enough to know that."

"Oh, but I'll have to go anyway," the girl interrupted. "Mommie can't be there alone; she'd worry herself to death if I didn't show up by dark. She worries about every little thing since daddy died. I ought to have gone before—or I oughtn't to have come. But she was worrying about you, Marthy. She hadn't seen or heard of you for a month, and she was afraid you might be sick or something. Why don't you get some one to stay with you? I think you ought to." She looked toward the door, which Jase had closed upon his departure. "If Jase should—get sick or anything"—

"Jase ain't goin' to git sick," Marthy retorted glumly. "Yuh don't want to let him worry yuh, Billy Louise. If I'd worried every time he yowled around about being sick I'd be dead or crazy by now. I dunno but maybe I'll have somebody to help with the work, though," she added after a pause, during which she had swiped the dishrag around the sides of the pan once or twice and had opened the door and thrown the water out beyond the doorstep like the sloven she was. "I got a nephew that wants to come out. He's been in a bank, but he's quit and wants to git on to a ranch. I dunno but I'll have him come in the spring."

"Do," urged Billy Louise, perfectly unconscious of the potentialities of the future. "I hate to think of you two down here alone. I don't suppose any one ever comes down here except me—and that isn't often."

"Nobody's got any call to come down," said Marthy stolidly. "They sure ain't going to come for our comp'ny, and there ain't nothing else to bring 'em."

"Well, there aren't many to come, you know," laughed Billy Louise, shaking out the dish towel and spreading it over two nails, as she did at home. "I'm your nearest neighbor, and I've got six miles to ride—against the wind at that. I think I'd better start. We've got a half breed doing chores for us, but he has to be looked after or he neglects things. I'll not get another chance to come very soon, I'm afraid. Mommie hates to have me ride around much in the winter. You send for that nephew right away, why don't you, Marthy?" It was like Billy Louise to mix command and entreaty together. "Really, I don't think Jase looks a bit well."

"A good strong steepin' of sage 'll fix him all right, only he ain't sick, as I see. You take this shawl."

Billy Louise refused the shawl and ran down the twisted path fringed with long, reaching fingers of the bare berry bushes. At the stable she stopped for an aimless dialogue with Jase and then rode away, past the orchard whose leafless branches gave glimpses of the low, sod roofed cabin, with Marthy standing rather disconsolately on the rough doorstep watching her go.

Blue was climbing steadily out of the gorge, twitching an ear backward with flattering attention whenever his lady spoke. The horse went on, calmly stepping over this rock and around that as if it were the simplest thing in the world to find sure footing and carry his lady smoothly up that trail. He threw up his head so suddenly that Billy Louise was startled out of her aimless dreamings and pointed nose and ears toward the little creek bottom above, where Marthy had lighted her campfire long and long ago.

A few steps farther and Blue stopped short in the trail to look and listen. Billy Louise could see the nervous twitchings of his muscles under the skin of neck and shoulders, and she smiled to herself. Nothing could ever come upon her unaware when she rode alone so long as she rode Blue. A hunting dog was not more keenly alive to his surroundings.

"Go on, Blue," she commanded after a minute. "If it's a bear or anything like that you can make a run for it; if it's a wolf I'll shoot it. You needn't stand here all night, anyway."

Blue went on, out from behind the willow growth that hid the open. He returned to his calm, picking a smooth trail through the scattered rocks and tiny washouts. It was the girl's turn to stare and speculate. She did not know this horseman who sat negligently in the saddle and looked up at the cedar grown bluff beyond while his horse stood knee deep in the little stream. She did not know him, and there were not so many travelers in the land that strangers were a matter of indifference.

Blue welcomed the horse with a democratic nicker and went forward briskly. And the rider turned his head, eyed the girl sharply as she came up and nodded a cursory greeting. His horse lifted its head to look, decided that it wanted another swallow or two and lowered its muzzle again to the water.

Billy Louise could not form any opinion of the man's age or personality, for he was encased in a wolfskin coat which covered him completely from hat brim to ankles. She got an impression of a thin, dark face and a sharp glance from eyes that seemed dark also. There was a thin, high nose, and beyond that Billy Louise did not look. If she had the mouth must certainly have reassured her somewhat.

Blue stepped nonchalantly down into the stream beside the strange horse and went across without stopping to drink. The strange horse moved on also, as if that were the natural thing to do—which it was, since chance sent them traveling the same trail. Billy Louise set her teeth together with the queer little vicious click that had always been her habit when she felt thwarted and constrained to yield to circumstances and straightened herself in the saddle.

"Looks like a storm," the fur coated one observed, with a perfectly transparent attempt to lighten the awkwardness.

Billy Louise tilted her chin upward and gazed at the gray sweep of clouds moving sullenly toward the mountains at her back. She glanced at the man and caught him looking intently at her face.

He did not look away immediately, as he should have done, and Billy Louise felt a little heat wave of embarrassment, emphasized by resentment.

"Are you going far?" he queried in the same tone he had employed before.

"Six miles," she answered shortly, though she tried to be decently civil.

"I've about eighteen," he said. "Looks like we'll both get caught out in a blizzard."

Certainly he had a pleasant enough voice, and, after all, it was not his fault that he happened to be at the crossing when she rode out of the gorge. Billy Louise, in common justice, laid aside her resentment and looked at him with a hint of a smile at the corners of her lips.

"That's what we have to expect when we travel in this country in the winter," she replied. "Eighteen miles will take you long after dark."

"Well, I was sort of figuring on putting up at some ranch if it got too bad. There's a ranch somewhere ahead on the Wolverine, isn't there?"

"Yes." Billy Louise bit her lip, but hospitality is an unwritten law of the West, a law not to be lightly broken. "That's where I live. We'll be glad to have you stop there of course."

The stranger must have felt and admired the unconscious dignity of her tone and words, for he thanked her simply and refrained from looking too intently at her face.

Fine siftings of snow, like meal flung down from a gigantic sieve, swept into their faces as they rode on. The man turned his face toward her after a long silence. She was riding with bowed head and face half turned from him and the wind alike.

"You'd better ride on ahead and get in out of this," he said curtly. "Your horse is fresh. It's going to be worse and more of it before long. This cayuse of mine has had thirty miles or so of rough going."

"I think I'd better wait for you," she said primly. "There are bad places where the trail goes close to the bluff, and the lava rock will be slippery with this snow, and it's getting dark so fast that a stranger might go over."

"If that's the case the sooner you are past the bad places the better. I'm all right. You drift along."

Billy Louise speculated briefly upon the note of calm authority in his voice. He did not know evidently that she was more accustomed to giving commands than to obeying them. Her lips gave a little quirk of amusement at his mistake.

"You go on. I don't want a guide." He tilted his head peremptorily toward the blurred trail ahead.

Billy Louise laughed a little. She did not feel in the least embarrassed now. "Do you never get what you don't want?" she asked mildly. "I'd a lot rather lead you past those places than have you go over the edge," she said, "because nobody could get you up or even go down and bury you decently. It wouldn't be a bit nice. It's much simpler to keep you on top."

He said something, but Billy Louise could not hear what it was. She sus-

"You'd Better Ride On Ahead and Get In Out of This."

pected him of swearing. She rode on in silence.

"Blue's a dandy horse on bad trails and in the dark," she observed companionably at last. "He simply can't lose his footing or his way."

"Yes? That's nice."

Billy Louise felt like putting out her tongue at him for the cool remoteness of his tone. It would serve him right to ride on and let him break his neck over the bluff if he wanted to. She shut her teeth together and turned her face away from him.

So, in silence and with no very good feeling between them, they went precariously down the steep hill (the hill up which Marthy and the oxen and Jase had toiled so laboriously twenty-seven years before) and across the tiny flat to where the cabin window winked a welcome at them through the storm.

CHAPTER II.

A Book, a Bannock, and a Bed.

BLUE led the way straight to the low, dirt roofed stable of logs and stopped with his nose against the closed door. Billy Louise herself was deceived by the whirl of snow and would have missed the stable entirely if the leadership had been hers. She patted Blue gratefully on the shoulder when she unsaddled him. She groped with her fingers for the wooden peg in the wall where the saddle should hang, failed to find it and so laid the saddle down against the logs and covered it with the blanket.

"Just turn your horse in loose," she directed the man shortly. "Blue won't fight, and I think the rest of the horses are in the other part. And come on to the house."

It pleased her a little to see that he obeyed her without protest, but she was not so pleased at his silence, and she led the way rather indignantly toward the winking eye which was the cabin's window.

At the sound of their feet on the wide doorstep her mother pulled open the door and stood fair in the light, looking out with an anxious look.

"Is that you, Billy Louise? Oh, ain't Peter Howling Dog with you? What makes you so terrible late, Billy Louise? Come right in, stranger. I don't know your name, but I don't need to know it. A storm like this is all the interduction a fellow needs, I guess."

"What about Peter?" Billy Louise asked. "Isn't he here?"

"No, and he ain't been since an hour or so after you left. He saddled up and rode off down the river, to the reservation, I reckon."

The stranger introduces himself as Ward Warren, who has a claim on Mill creek. Billy Louise has had many day dreams about a man bearing that name.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Home Town Helps

CANNOT IMPROVE ON NATURE

Gardeners Are Inclined to Make So-Called Improvements Which Ruin Beauty of Landscape.

The poet Wordsworth wrote: "Laying out grounds, as it is called, may be considered as a liberal art, in some sort like poetry and painting; and its object, like that of all the liberal arts, is, or ought to be, to move the affections under the control of good sense. If this be so when we are merely putting together words or colors, how much more ought the feeling to prevail when we are in the midst of the realities of things; of the beauty and harmony, of the joy of happiness of human creatures; of men and children, of birds and beasts, of hills and streams, and trees and flowers, with the changes of night and day, evening and morning, summer and winter, and all their unwearied actions and energies."

All those about to garden in rural districts would do well to read the foregoing several times if extensive changes are contemplated, says the Los Angeles Times. All too many view the natural landscapes as something to be obliterated, overcome, or subdued; whereas, quite to the contrary, it generally needs assistance and accentuation to bring out still stronger its best natural features. Too much destruction is visited upon the fair face of nature when man commences his so-called improvements.

Hills are cut down, canyons and hollows filled, trees and shrubs uprooted, areas burned over, all not only unnecessary but absolutely ruinous to natural beauty and constituting moral criminality that by rights should be punishable by laws aimed to protect primal beauty against the machinations of the vandal, man. Too often the beauty spoiler uproots a fine native tree or shrub to make room for a poorer one from Tehuantepec or Timbuctoo, ignorant, evidently, that he has made a very poor exchange and paid money for the fancied privilege of doing so. We need a campaign of education that he who now destroys will recognize that if he lived a thousand years and spent fortunes he could never improve upon what nature has given us except by aiding and adding and never by destroying and reconstructing. Landscape gardening has rightly been called "the art that doth mend nature."

WILL ADOPT ENGLISH PLAN

Syndicate Proposes to Construct Large Number of "Co-operative Homes" in Pennsylvania City.

Plans are under way to construct at least 1,000 homes in Marcus Hook, Delaware county, Pennsylvania. One of the most interesting of the projects is for the construction of 57 houses on a plan similar to that of the English village of Chester. This plan is sponsored by a Philadelphia syndicate, and the estimated cost is upwards of $250,000. According to specifications the village will center at an intersection of two streets.

The proposed homes will be of the type known as "co-operative homes," similar to those being built at Bourneville and Port Sunlight, England. The dwellings will be built of brick and stucco, with sloping roofs and will be set well back on lawns. At each of the four corners of the four principal residential squares there will be a triangular shaped lawn with shrubbery and flowers.

Damage From Lightning Small.

The damage to property from lightning is so small that it is almost negligible, in comparison to the damage by fire of other origin. That modern building construction makes the danger from lightning much less in the cities than it is in the country is the contention of the Electrical Review, which says that the metallic roofs and the steel that enters largely into the construction of buildings in the cities seem to rob the lightning of most of its destructive power, even if buildings are struck.

Passing-Through Parks.

Small parks in congested business centers are necessarily "passing-through" parks. Central Square in Los Angeles is one of them, says the Los Angeles Times. More people each day use it to pass through than the total of those who merely loiter for a whole month. For that reason no landscaping should be done that will interfere with traffic, utility being the first consideration. This is not necessarily true of a small park in a small town where it is the only one and must serve all purposes.

Nut Trees Make Good Shade.

Nut trees make good shade; in the fields in groves they may become profitable, in the barn lot they serve an excellent purpose, and along the roadside they should always be planted.

"Pea Tree" For Garden.

The "pea tree," botanically known as Caraganus arborescens, is described as a shrub worthy of place in any garden, yet its foliage is good for browsing.